

## THE AMBITION OF EVA.



VA NORRINGTON inserted her latch key into the key-hole of a Bedford Square boarding-house, and entered. It was a dismal, windy, rainy November evening, and ever since lunch she

had been paddling about London, climbing grimy stairs of newspaper offices, and talking to people who did not seem especially pleased to see her. Her skirts were wet, and a wisp of damp hair was tumbling over her eyes. On the hall table, disclosed by the flickering gas-jet, were some letters.

"A year ago to-day!" said Eva to herself as she closed the door against the wind. "Has he written, or has he forgotten?"

He had not forgotten. Eva picked up the letter from the hall table, looked quickly round at the closed hall door, at the closed dining-room door, and at the baize door that led to the kitchen stairs—and kissed it. Then she went upstairs to her bed-sitting-room with the letter in her hand, and joy in her heart.

"Hateful little room!" she murmured to herself, as she struck a match and lit the gas. "But it's the last time, thank God!"

The room was not really bad; a bed in the corner, a wash-stand, a ward-robe, here and there a picture on the walls, and a table by the window, rather rickety, on which lay a heap of manuscript—a half-finished story.

"I will burn that before I go to bed to-night," said Eva, as she caught sight of it.

Then she took off her hat and cloak, drew the only easy-chair under the gas-jet and sat down, fingering the letter—she did not open it at once. Now that happiness stretched in front of her it was pleasant to linger on the confines of misery, to look back on the life she was to leave.

"It is not every one," said Eva reflectively, "who can make experiments in life—without expense."

Eva Norrington had been the pride of the provincial town which gave her birth. At the High School no girl could stand against her. Her form-governess, who now and then asked her favorite pupils to tea, even said she might be a head-mistress one day. To Eva this seemed absurd. But when, at the age of twenty, she gained a guinea prize for a story in a weekly paper,

she began to think that at least she might be a great novelist. At any rate she felt sure that somewhere ahead of her stretched a career; and as her twenty-first birthday approached she announced to her startled parents her intention of going to London in search of it. Thereupon ensued a series of domestic scenes such as have been common of late in the homes of England, wherein the parents play the part of the apprehensive hen, the daughter that of the adventurous duckling. The duckling invariably gains its point; and so it was with Eva Norrington. Having refuted argument and resisted persuasion for a certain number of weeks, Eva obtained a grudging consent to her departure. The townspeople knew not whether to admire

cess. She would have been quite happy but for Allan Craig. For Allan Craig, whenever he heard that Eva was bent on going to London to make a name for herself, promptly offered her his own for a substitute. It was a good enough name, and at the foot of a check it was generally respected, as Allan Craig had lately stepped into his father's business as estate agent and was prospering. Eva was disturbed, but she turned not aside from her project. Eva had mapped out her life and Allan Craig was not included in the scheme.

As she sat fingering her letter in her bedroom, she went over the parting scene in her mind. The details of it could only increase the delight of the letter. For Eva had learned during the past year that happiness is so rare that it deserves to be rolled on the tongue and not swallowed in haste. It was at a dance on the night before her departure—her last dance, so she thought, before she started life in earnest. They were sitting out a dance together, for Eva was not disposed to think unkindly of Allan, though she might resent his intrusion into her scheme of life. She remembered how there had been silence between them for some moments, how Allan had leaned his elbows on his knees and dug the heel of his dancing-shoe into the carpet.

"And so you are quite determined to leave us?" said Allan.

"Of course," replied Eva. "My boxes are all packed."

"Full of manuscript novels and other things?"

"One novel and several stories."

"I cannot understand why you want to go when——"

"I want to—well—to live a larger life."

"You mean you want to live in a bigger place?"

"Well, not exactly. I don't think you quite understand."

"I quite understand that there is not enough scope for you here, and that I am a

selfish brute for trying to keep you from your ambition. Look here, Eva, can you honestly say that you don't love me a little bit?"

Allan had risen and was standing over her. Eva looked up at him. She could see him standing there now—big, comely, with something in his eyes that thrilled her, half with fear and half with pleasure. She rose and faced him.

"I shall be sorry to leave you—very sorry."

"Then why——"

"Can't you see, Allan? I know I have it in me to do good work, and I must be where good work is wanted. Here I am hampered; in London——"

"You may fail," said Allan, with a note



"ALLAN WAS OBVIOUSLY PROUD OF KNOWING HER, AND INTRODUCED HIS WIFE."

or disapprove. But they had read in novels of young ladies who took their lives and latchkeys into their own hands, became famous, and married respectably after all. So during the weeks of preparation for her campaign, Eva became something of a figure in local society, and more than one dinner-party was given in her honor, as well as plentiful advice as to the necessary precautions against London gulls, and many recipes for guarding against the colds induced by the fogs that infest the metropolis.

Eva was almost happy; for she had the hopefulness of youth and beauty, and all the exhilaration of taking her life into her hands and fashioning it as she would, with none to raise objections to the pro-